

String of Pearls

Nancy Purcell

Outside Austin, Russell Featherstone drove his Cadillac onto the shoulder of Highway 290, threw the gear into park, and turned to the woman beside him. “What do you say we get married?”

Ellie Pickett’s head jerked toward him so fast she heard her vertebrae crack. At first, when he’d pulled off the highway so abruptly, she thought something was wrong with the engine, but now she believed it was her hearing. “Married? Land sakes, Russell, we just met two weeks ago! Married?” She blinked a few times then fixed her eyes on him. “You’re not one of those crazies, are you?” She shook her head. “You know what I’m sayin’? One of those men that meets a gal, favors the swing of her skirt, and decides to marry her?” Her brow wrinkled and she lowered her chin. “Tell me you’re not some sex maniac. There’ve been plenty of warnin’s on television about men like that.”

Ellie’s husband, Leland Pickett of Seneca, South Carolina, had passed on to Glory some three years ago. Whenever someone inquired about his death, she’d snap her fingers and answer, “Died in his sleep, just like that.” They had one daughter, Lisa, who’d moved to Texas – Austin – with her husband twenty years before.

Ellie and Leland had never visited Lisa during those years; there was always an excuse: too far, too costly, too whatever. In

reality, Leland just preferred staying home. So when Lisa invited her mother to Austin for a month, she grabbed the opportunity. Since her husband's death Ellie had an itch to do something with her life. She'd grown tired of hearing folks gush about their cruises to everywhere. Tired of watching people on TV jump up and down because they'd won a trip to some island she didn't know existed. And it was because of that itch that she now found herself parked on a Texas roadside with a man named Russell.

"Good Lord, Ellie. All I said was 'Why don't we get married?'" Russell let loose of the steering wheel and slumped in the seat. He gently placed his hand on her forearm as if to reassure her she was safe. "I like you, Ellie," he said in a voice as sweet as a songbird's. "Hell, I'm crazy over you! Sure we just met, but I've closed deals for millions with less time invested." He blew out a lungful of air, turned up the air-conditioning fan, and waited for her reaction.

"That may be so," she shot back, wagging a finger at him, "but I'm not some oil field you're biddin' on. Not this gal!" She turned down the visor, leaned forward, and studied herself in the lighted mirror. Ellie knew that, despite her age, she was still attractive; the mirror renewed her opinion. She ran her tongue across her teeth and rubbed her lips together, smoothing out pink lipstick. A quick wipe of a finger beneath each eye cleared away smudged eyeliner.

As she primped her full white hair and batted the lashes of her blue eyes she could hear her daddy teasing about boys chasing after her. "You'll soon have as many beaux as pearls on a string," he'd say, then slap his knee and let loose a belly laugh. Ellie pushed the visor back up, wiggled her fanny into the leather seat and opened her handbag. "Hmm . . . thought I'd put a handkerchief in here before we left Lisa's." While she was rummaging, Russell stared at her. Out of the corner of her eye

Ellie caught him watching her and wondered if he still thought of her as a “pint-sized bit of dynamite.”

It was Lisa who’d introduced them to each other. That is, Lisa and her best friend Barbara, who also happened to be Russell’s daughter. The two fifty-year-old empty nesters dedicated way too much time to makeover television shows and romance novels. Having lost control of their children’s lives, and finding themselves unable to exercise little, if any, control over their husbands, they cooked up a plan to enrich the lives of their elderly, single parents: Russell, age eighty-six, and Ellie, eighty-four.

“Well?” Russell queried. Ellie was engaged in zipping and unzipping the eight compartments of her handbag, searching for a hanky. “Ellie! Have you gone deaf?”

“Shush, Russell. Can’t you see I’m thinkin’?” She zipped a small side pocket closed and screwed up her face. “Has it occurred to you that I don’t even know your middle name?” She folded her hands atop the purse and turned her attention to the flowers growing along the roadside. Lovely bluebonnets, she thought. They’d sure look pretty on the kitchen table. I always wanted to do that – keep a white pitcher full of daisies on the table. It’d be like waking up to sunshine. Leland had been allergic to pollen, so fresh flowers in the house were always out of the question. “That’s why the darn things grow outside,” he’d told her. The man even went so far as to chop down the stately pines in the front yard. Their crime: dropping yellow-green pollen come spring. Ellie wondered if Russell had allergies.

“Elvin,” he said. “My middle name is Elvin. Now will you marry me?”

Ellie turned in her seat, reached forward, and lowered the fan speed. “What kind of name is Elvin? Sounds like a family name. Don’t reckon I’ve ever heard it before and, believe me, in South Carolina we’ve got a slew of weird names. Did I ever tell

you my husband Leland's younger brother's name was Bowser? Family just called him Bow-wow. Now ain't that an awful thing? Saddling a child with a name like Bowser? I told Lisa if she ever —"

"Ellie, for God's sake, what are you talkin' about? Who the hell cares if some kid grew up with the name Bow-wow?"

"Bowser."

"Bowser, schmowser. Who cares? Certainly not me, and certainly not today!" Russell reached over and picked up a can of lemonade from the console, took a sip, and set it down. "Mighty tasty for being canned," he mumbled. He smacked his lips and ran a finger along his mustache then pushed the fan dial up one speed. "I'm talking marriage here and you're talking gibberish." Just then an eighteen-wheeler passed by with such speed that the Cadillac rocked.

"Mercy," Ellie shouted, her hand flying to her chest. "We'll be killed parked out here in the middle of nowhere, Russell. I don't think this is a good idea." She glanced at the key in the ignition as if to will it to turn. Nothing happened. Noticing the Cadillac emblem she recalled how Leland had favored Chevrolets. He always was tight with the dollar. He'd never have bought anything as fine or pricey as this Cadillac. She slid her hand along the soft leather; smooth as a newborn. Wouldn't take much for a gal to get used to this kind of luxury.

Ellie picked up the conversation. "So I'm talking gibberish, am I? Is this a preview of how I can expect to be treated? Brought up short every time I share a memory?" She peered at him and pursed her lips, then returned her focus to the highway. "There's enough traffic out there to make a body think it's a holiday. I suppose if I were to ask why you have those longhorns stuck up there on your hood, well, that'd be gibberish, too." Without waiting for him to catch up or answer, she leaned forward and opened the glove compartment. "Any chance I'll

find a pack of tissues in here? I think I'm gonna need them." She began removing papers, folders and gadgets, and piling them on her lap. Leland's old Chevy had a glove compartment about the size of a sandwich, she told herself. Russell's packed enough junk in it to fill a file cabinet.

While she was busy with her latest project, Russell heaved a sigh and offered a thought. "You know, the last time I pulled over on the side of a highway was back in 1988 – or was it '89? Blew out a tire – right front, I think – could have been right rear, now that I call it to mind. Damn near scared me to death." Just then two trucks flew past, honking their horns in unison. "Well, talk about being scared to death. You all right, Ellie?" No answer. "Hmm. Where was I?" He gripped the steering wheel as if he could squeeze an answer from it.

Meanwhile, Ellie had emptied the glove compartment without finding any tissues. She began folding old oil change receipts, inspection check-up sheets, and flattening folded pages in the ownership manual. After studying the registration certificate, she started putting the papers back in the compartment.

"Oh, yes. The flat tire," he said, picking up his train of thought. "Well, anyway, I changed the thing myself and it made me realize that, sixty-nine years old or not, age was just a state of mind." He smiled at her, as if expecting a reply.

She blinked a few times then fixed her eyes on him. "What are you talkin' about? How'd you get from 'Let's get married' to a flat tire in 1988?"

"Could've been '89."

"I asked the simple question, 'What's your middle name?'" Ellie said, "and you go on about a flat tire – could'a been 1988, could'a been 1989, could'a been right front, could'a been right rear. Lord, Russell, and you just said I talk gibberish. Ain't that just like a man? By the way, do you have allergies?" He shook

his head no and she continued returning things to the glove compartment. A gold charm on a chain with a key attached caught her eye. It was one of those key rings sold in gas stations and gift shops, the kind with every name from A-to-Z hanging on a spinner. Ellie turned it over. ADA was painted in bright red letters. “Thought you said your wife’s name was Frances? Who’s Ada?” She dangled the key chain in front of his face.

“Ada? Where the heck did that thing come from?” He reached for it but Ellie pulled it back. “I just want to see it. Maybe it’ll refresh my memory.”

“Russell Featherstone, you’d better come clean. I’ve got no intention of marrying a man who’s a two-timer. My sister Callie married one of those and lived to regret it. Had four children by that man, kept a clean house, and cooked every night. No matter. He still couldn’t keep his pants zipped.”

Upon hearing the word “zipped,” Russell asked, “Honey pie, did you unzip that outside pocket when you were looking for your hanky?” He motioned with a finger to a zipper on the front of her handbag.

Ellie’s eyes flicked to his face, then down at her bag. “Don’t believe I did.” She pulled the silver tab and withdrew a pale blue handkerchief. “You’re so smart, Russell,” she said, leaning toward him and pecking his cheek.

A broad grin covered the old gentleman’s face, as if he were finally on firm ground and could return their discussion to the core issue: marriage.

“That’s what surprises me,” Ellie went on. “Smart man like you takes a lady out for a drive in his big-fancy-Texas-oilman car with all intentions of proposing and leaves evidence of another woman in plain sight.” She slowly reached for the fan dial and turned it down.

“Wasn’t in plain sight. You found it when you were poking around in the glove compartment. Remember?”

Ellie fingered the key chain, turning it over and over. “What kind of car did she have? Or maybe I should say does she have?” Now she was swinging the key back and forth. Outside a tumbleweed dancing across the terrain caught her eye. I love dancing. Wonder if Russell likes to dance?

“Ellie Pickett, you are one frustrating woman. How the hell do I know who Ada was? Could have been a friend of one of the grandchildren. Could have been one of those nurses I carted back and forth to care for Frances. Heaven help me if you ever find a phone number scratched on a piece of paper and I can’t remember whose it is! Guess once you say you’ll marry me, I’ll have to examine every nook and cranny of my house or you’ll change your mind.”

So . . . I guess he’s planning on moving me into the same house he lived in with Frances. Now that would be just too strange. What if the furniture’s in poor taste? Lord, Leland hung on to that ratty old sofa of his mamma’s like it was spun from gold.

The couple was so engrossed in conversation they never noticed the car that had pulled up behind them. A knock on Russell’s window caused both of them to jump in their seats and their mouths to drop open.

“Sorry if I scared you, sir,” yelled a fortyish man with hair tied in a ponytail and a tee shirt that read “Viva Zapata.” “I just wondered if you might need help. You know, maybe needed a cellphone or something?”

“No, no,” Russell said. “We’re fine. Thank you for stopping.” He had cracked the window and now abruptly closed it and turned the air-conditioning up a notch. He made the mistake of asking Ellie, “Where were we?”

“I was gonna say that that’s how Callie caught Edgar.”

“Stranded on the side of the road without a cellphone?”

“No, no, silly. A phone number on a slip of paper. See, she was cleanin’ out his pockets, gettin’ his pants ready for the dry cleaners, and she came upon a slip of paper with a phone number and a woman’s name written on it.” She looked down at the key ring. “Name could have been Ada for all I remember. Wouldn’t that be a coincidence?” She closed her fist around the key. Poor Callie, she told herself. She never did get over that. Threw him out and then had to work at that cotton mill ten hours a day. Ellie opened her fist. “If you really don’t know Ada, then I expect you wouldn’t mind if I opened the window and tossed this away, would you?” Her finger tapped on the window control button.

A look of relief crossed Russell’s face. “Be my guest. Throw it out. Bury it, if it’ll make you happy. Then let’s get back to discussing something important, like marriage.”

Ellie studied him: he was still a good-looking man, one of those men instantly recognized as a quality person. His gray hair was combed back, sort of longish, and his full mustache was neatly trimmed. She’d been taken with him since that first Sunday after she’d arrived from South Carolina.

It was right before church when Barbara had voiced her surprise plan: brunch with her father at his country club. When they entered the clubhouse foyer, there he sat – quite dashing in a green sport coat and khaki pants, his boots highly polished. For some reason Ellie’s stomach had fluttered, but at the time she attributed it to gas. Now she noticed the twinkle in his chestnut brown eyes. So why this nagging fear of giving him the answer he wants?

It wasn’t because her daughter would be upset, or because she – Ellie – didn’t want to let go of her old life. Truth was she wanted nothing more than to leave that other life. It’s why she’d flown a thousand miles to Texas. Hoping to find something she’d missed. She had loved Leland but she was only eighteen

when they married. What did she know about life, about anything? She'd never traveled anywhere, other than a visit to the State House in Columbia. Besides, Leland was a homebody, a worker; travel held no excitement for him. So Ellie packed away her dreams like too-small clothes, saving them for another day. After Lisa's invitation, Ellie aired out those little dreams and carried them to Texas. Now she wondered if her hesitation was nothing more than the fear of beginning a new life chapter.

Her fingers worried across the letters A-D-A and she decided to throw her caution and the keychain to the Texas winds. Ellie pushed the window button and flung the key chain as hard as she could. As the window slid noiselessly to a close, she said, "And don't you be drivin' out here to mile marker 142 searchin' for that thing!"

Russell took her hand in his, brushed her fingertips with his mustache, then kissed them. "Does that mean your answer is yes?" He waited.

"Let's just say I'll give you my answer after you've told me what those longhorns are about and answered my other question."

"Which one?"

"You know. I asked if you were a sex maniac."

"Well, the first one's easy; I put them there because I could. When I was a youngster every rich Texas oilman had longhorns on his car hood. I decided if I ever hit it big that's what I'd do. And I have, so I did. Whenever I look at them they tell me, 'Ease up, Russell. Grab life by the horns and live a little.' Which is why I'm working so hard at roping you in." And he pinched her cheek.

"I'm still waitin' for the answer to my other question."

"Now that one's going to be more difficult. You'll have to marry me and find out for yourself!"

Ellie giggled, reached over, and ran her fingers through his hair. “You’re a handsome devil, know it?” She kissed him and then wiggled herself down into the seat.

Russell hit the directional signal and pulled onto the highway. Twenty minutes later he looked over at her and chuckled. “What number did you say that mile marker was?”

Sweetness painted Ellie’s face and she answered in a singsongy voice, “Maybe it was 124, or it could’a been 241. Nope, I think it was 142. But I’m not certain. Anyway, I imagine my memory will get a lot better once I’m Ellie Featherstone.” She leaned forward and began fiddling with the radio, searching for an oldies station. She also lowered the air-conditioning fan. “That’s the thing about getting older. Unimportant things slip your mind so easily.” Suddenly she ramped up the volume and shouted, “Russell, listen! It’s Glen Miller’s band playin’ ‘String of Pearls.’ Did I ever tell you I love to dance? You do like dancin’, don’t you?”

After the Beach at Sixteen

Sharon Lask Munson

We saunter down Jefferson Avenue —
unfamiliar territory to west-side girls,
past streets lined with apartments,
sidewalks stamped Detroit Public Works,
small family-owned shops closed on Sunday,
their windows replete with upholstery samples,
ready-made silk draperies, bulky rolls of oilcloth,
and advertisements for dry cleaning Pendleton wool.

Our arms linked, red and blistered,
bodies sticky with Coppertone,
sand gritty between our toes,
lips and nails ruddy with Revlon's Fire and Ice.
We walk tall, aware, stomachs flat,
shoulders high, in step,
listening to the flip-flop beat
of our summer sandals.

We stop at Lucille's Eastside Barbecue,
gnaw blackened ribs, spicy, dripping red —
as non-kosher as the lean and tawny
blue-eyed, blond-haired boys we ogle.

We lick our fingers,
push back our chairs,
adjust our filmy skirts to the tight
still damp suits beneath,
sashay out the door
and take the Dexter Bus
west, past downtown
the rest of the way home.

*good at any age**Carl Palmer*

so what do you say
wanna give it a try
I know we're both out of practice

remember the last time you did it
me either
we'll start out slow and easy
be patient and understanding
no use rushing right into it
there is nothing to prove
no need to keep score
I'm sure it won't be anything
to write home about
or tell a close friend
to keep secret

it's really nobody's business
how well we
bowl

The Front Seat

Lynn Pinkerton

In one of my favorite “Peanuts” cartoon strips, Charlie Brown reminisces about falling asleep in the backseat of his parents’ car on the way home from a night outing. He relishes how sweet it is to be a little kid sleeping in the backseat, while the big people sit up front and do the worrying and when you get home, your dad picks you up and carries you into the house, and you don’t have to worry because they take care of everything.

~§~

It’s a lot of work to get old. And to die. And it’s really a lot of work to do it responsibly. Suddenly it’s your turn to sit in the front seat and take care of things for those tucked in behind you. It becomes serious business to spin a meaningful life for yourself and at the same time, sensibly plan an exit strategy that is the least intrusive to those waving good-bye. The whole thing is like a trip to a giant Geezers Super Center. The aisles are long and daunting and none of the choices are particularly appealing.

One aisle unfurls into an endless array of paperwork. Attorneys smiling suitable smiles beckon you with big wills written in small print, directives to the doctor about when to disconnect you from tomorrow, plans for who takes over if dementia sets up shop in your memories, power of attorney for those life-altering hospital hallway conversations and HIPPA forms deciding who gets to know about it. Thinking of it all is

overwhelming. You want to leave your basket in the middle of this bizarre shopping trip and flee into the joyous, yellow sun and let nature take its course.

Another aisle, sparse and unassuming, touts the virtues of clearing out the clutter in your life, so that nosey relatives are spared the chore. It's a good exercise, regardless of how many years you plan to hang around, but thinking about what the next generation might do with my "I Walked on Fire with Tony Robbins" T-shirt, puts a different spin on it. For over thirty years, my dead grandmother's china has sat in the garage packed up and dusty. It's up for grabs. Who wants the Santa collection? Photos of forgotten college friends? The blue velvet dress my grandmother made me when I was seven? It's exhausting to figure out what's clutter for those posthumous packers or if in fact, I might wear that T-shirt on Saturday.

Next is an aisle filled with high-energy wizards of Wall Street preaching the virtues of financial peace. They can't tell you exactly how much money you will need for your time left, but can tell you it's probably not enough. They are filled with information on how to be debt-free and dozens of ways to swell your savings. They make you insecure about Social Security, but can shore you up with IRAs and investments. And if it turns out you're going to be watching *Wheel of Fortune* in a friendly facility of some sort, there is long term care insurance. Although the cost is enough to make you consider a shortcut to your appointment with St. Peter.

The Geezer Super Center also offers responsible pre-planning for your last big hoorah. Soft spoken funeral planners become sympathetic tour guides through your final send-off shopping excursion. Traditional burial or cremation? Embalming and beauticians and organists and cosmetology and picking out just the right outfit. And then there is the casket. Themed design options include musical, occupational, military

or humorous (“Return to Sender” motif from the folks touting they “Put the Fun in Funeral”.) Bikers can select removable keepsake hardware emblazoned with “Live to Ride” made from genuine motorcycle parts. For Al Gore groupies, there is an “eco-casket”. The do-it-yourselfers can purchase a casket kit and the long-term planners can select casket furniture. Furniture for a lifetime...and beyond. Or skip all this rigmarole and opt for trouble-free cremation.

Another turn in the Geezer Super Center reveals a calmer, more serene aisle showcasing ways to get your spiritual life in shape. The offerings include blessings and prayer beads and retreats and priests and pilgrimages and healers and sweat lodges and books and mentors and ministers. It seems the pursuit of a peaceful spirit is also a little mystifying. Conversations with yourself at 3:00 a.m. ache for reassurance that your time on earth has in fact made any sort of difference and that the essence of you will continue on.

Meanwhile, the dance with life picks up speed. Mortality marches on in relentless pursuit as 80 million baby boomers strive to live their “Best Life Now” with Oprah, get “real” with Dr. Phil, stay positive with Joel Osteen and check in with Chuck on investment strategies. We keep the juices flowing stronger and longer with veggies and fruits and tofu and treadmills and scans and check-ups and hot sex and Harleys. We breathe deep and meditate, shout hopeful prayers and align our *chakras*, color our hair, take vitamins and slather on magic creams – all while trying to finally find our real, true passion before it’s too late.

It’s exhausting work to always sit in the front seat and steer the course. It wears you out and you miss highlights of the World’s Best Road Trip. Best bet is to gas up the car, put it on cruise control and trust the journey.

Relics

Sharon Lask Munson

All my dime store turtles are buried
under the spreading yellow rosebush
in the back yard of the Burlingame Street house.
Someone coming years after may find their tiny bones
along with two blue-green marbles,
a plastic Sky King decoder ring,
the tattered leather collar of a well-loved puppy,
and the beginnings of a silver ball
made from cigarette and gum wrappers
found behind ash cans in the rank and narrow alleyway.

Digging further, they might come across a red rubber ball,
bits and pieces of one Captain Marvel comic book
borrowed from Melvin Markowitz and never returned,
along with a card from the deck of Go Fish.
What can't be found will be gentle voices
echoing down the pathways of time
David, David Appleman, dinner
Leansies, clapsies, twirl around to backsies
A my name is Alice, B my name is Babs
and the summer evening's organ grinder
the chatter and chain of his monkey
as they shuffle down the street.

Can You Play?

Sharon Ellison

You don't have to be very old to make choices that color the rest of your life. When I was five, I decided I needed piano lessons. Two of my cousins, only a few years older, were taking lessons and would entertain the family when we visited their house. There was just one small problem. We had no piano.

"Can I take piano lessons?"

Mother smiled.

"Can I?"

"We'll have to think about it."

Tap and ballet lessons had lasted only a few weeks. I could sing "I'm a Little Teapot" with motions; that's about it. Mother probably thought the same thing would happen with piano lessons. Plus, lessons and a piano were expensive.

My cousin taught me to play "Chop Sticks." We played duets at her house; so I kept asking at home, "Can I take piano lessons?"

One day, when I was seven, mother surprised me. "Yes. We'll try it."

I could hardly believe my ears. Startled, I responded, "What about a piano?"

"The music teacher said you can start lessons without a piano." That seemed odd, but lessons began.

About a month later, mother came home from work with a toy piano. A TOY! Oh, it was cute and it even had a little bench

that fit me pretty well; still, it was a toy. Mother borrowed it from a friend...actually her friend's daughter. I set my music book on the piano, pulled up the bench and played the first two songs I had learned. It worked! The toy worked! There were about 20 keys. Plenty for a beginner.

I sat in my room and played the little songs. Fortunately, I got a new song almost every week, so my parents didn't have to listen to the same ones over and over for very long.

There were some surprises. Nobody had mentioned music theory. I hated it, but I wanted to play the piano, so I tried to learn what I needed to know.

Six months later, a huge, old, upright piano was delivered to our house. Was I excited! No more practicing on the toy. I guess Mother and Daddy believed I really was serious. For them, it was quite an investment.

A year later, there was a change of teachers. Now there were two, and they insisted I practice one hour each day! Mother and Daddy set up a routine for me. I had to practice 30 minutes before school and 30 minutes after. Neighbor children would show up at my door and ask, "Can you play?" I would roll my eyes, responding, "No, I have to practice first." It was harder on weekends, but as I recall, I didn't have to practice on Sundays. Ah! A day of rest.

A couple of years later, one of the teachers looked at my hands and exclaimed, "You'll never be able to play the piano. Your fingers are too short!"

I was shocked and hurt. My mother was furious! She dialed the teacher's number and said, "Listen! I realize you know a lot about music, but we are paying you to teach our daughter to play the piano...not to tell her she can't do it!" That spring marked the final lesson with this husband and wife team.

For the next two years, I had lessons from a nice young woman who was a student at one of our local universities,

complete with recitals and entries in Music Guild contests. By then, I was playing the piano while my parents sang duets in church. They reasoned that since I practiced with them at home, I should play for them at church. So it was, and I also began playing in the children's departments.

For five and a half years, I took piano lessons and practiced every day. I'm certain my parents were sick and tired of hearing me practice scales. I was certainly tired of them. Sometimes I played for my sixth grade choir and was playing "as needed" at church. I had reached the point where I wanted to play fun things instead of what the teacher chose. Classical music was her preference. It was okay, but church music and popular songs, like some of my friends were playing, were my choice. So I asked...okay, I begged my parents...to stop lessons.

My playing, however, did not stop. Accompanying the seventh grade choir was challenging. At first I was quite timid and played softly. A comment by the choir director changed all that. After halting the choir mid-song, she said, "Sharon, if you're going to make a mistake, then make a loud one! The choir needs to hear the piano." I took that advice to heart and still play with a heavy hand.

Filling in for the church pianist almost became a part-time job...without pay, of course. I may not have been great, but I was willing. One summer, my best friend and I took organ lessons for three months because our church had bought a new organ and only one person knew how to play it. We both filled in as needed. It wasn't so difficult, especially since we had both taken piano lessons.

Although I have a B.B.A. degree in Management, I never stopped playing the piano. People assumed I would get my degree in music, but I wanted music to be fun. Getting the degree would have been serious work! I never aspired to be a concert pianist. I simply wanted to be able to sit down and play

music I love. I can and I do, as often as possible. The first year we were married, my husband told me he could tell exactly what kind of day I had at work by the way I played the piano when I got home. It's how I unwind.

For over 50 years, I have played the piano – mainly for church services – but also for soloists, quartets, duets, ensembles, anniversary parties, open houses, civic club meetings, weddings and funerals. For 22 of those years, my husband and I served our church – he as music director and I as church pianist and choir director.

Is there something you have always wanted to do? Set your heart on it. Get started. Don't wait any longer. If you have the desire, you can do it. What is the path to your passion?

Who Was That Masked Man?

Sarah Getty

For years, in front of those black-and-white TV's,
we believed we'd grow up to be cowboys.
Boys, girls, not one of us escaped the dream —
the drop to horseback from the balcony, the ride
through the dust to catch the black hat, the umpteenth
daring rescue of somebody helpless and blonde.

Oh, it was fun to be the good guy, it was easy.
All it took was a white hat, a pair of six-guns,
and a strong, good-natured horse. The bad guys
